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# Dark Enlightenment

The **Dark Enlightenment**, also called the **neo-reactionary movement** (sometimes abbreviated to **NRx**), is an anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian,[1] and reactionary philosophical and political movement.[2] The term "Dark Enlightenment" is a reaction to the Age of Enlightenment and an apologia for the popular conception of the Dark Ages.

The ideology generally rejects Whig historiography,[3] the concept that history shows an inevitable progression towards greater liberty and enlightenment, culminating in liberal democracy and constitutional monarchy,[3] in favor of a return to traditional societal constructs and forms of government, including absolute monarchism and other older forms of leadership like cameralism.[4]

## History

Neo-reactionaries are an informal community of bloggers and political theorists who have been active since the 2000s. Steve Sailer is a contemporary forerunner of the ideology, which also draws influence from philosophers such as Thomas Carlyle and Julius Evola.[5][6]

Curtis Yarvin

In 2007 and 2008, software engineer Curtis Yarvin, writing under the pen name Mencius Moldbug, articulated what would develop into Dark Enlightenment thinking. Yarvin's theories were elaborated and expanded by philosopher Nick Land, who first coined the term Dark Enlightenment in his essay of the same name.[5][7][8]

By mid-2017, NRx had moved to forums such as the Social Matter online forum, the Hestia Society, and Thermidor Magazine. In 2021, Yarvin appeared on Fox News' *Tucker Carlson Today*, where he discussed the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan and his concept of the "Cathedral", which he claims to be the current aggregation of political power and influential institutions that is controlling the country.[9]

Several prominent Silicon Valley investors and Republican politicians have expressed their influence from the philosophy, with venture capitalist Peter Thiel describing Yarvin as his "most important connection".[10] Political strategist Steve Bannon has read and admired his work.[11] U.S. Vice President JD Vance has cited Yarvin as an influence.[12][13][14] Michael Anton, the State Department Director of Policy Planning during Trump's second presidency, has also discussed Yarvin's ideas.[15] In January 2025, Yarvin attended a Trump inaugural gala in Washington; *Politico* reported he was "an informal guest of honor" due to his "outsize influence over the Trumpian right."[16]

## Beliefs

Central to Nick Land's ideas is a belief in freedom's incompatibility with democracy. Land drew inspiration from libertarians such as Peter Thiel, as indicated in his essay *The Dark Enlightenment*.[17] The Dark Enlightenment has been described by journalists and commentators as alt-right and neo-fascist.[3][18] A 2016 article in *New York* magazine notes that "Neoreaction has a number of different strains, but perhaps the most important is a form of post-libertarian futurism that, realizing that libertarians aren't likely to win any elections, argues against democracy in favor of authoritarian forms of government."[19]

Andy Beckett stated that "NRx" supporters "believe in the replacement of modern nation-states, democracy and government bureaucracies by authoritarian city states, which on neoreaction blogs sound as much like idealised medieval kingdoms as they do modern enclaves such as Singapore."[20] The modern solution devised by Yarvin in "A Formalist Manifesto" advocates for a form of neocameralism in which small, authoritarian "gov-corps" coexist and compete with each other.[21] He claims freedom under the system would be guaranteed by the ability to "vote with your feet", whereby residents could leave for another gov-corp if they felt it would provide a higher quality of life, thus forcing competition. Nick Land reiterates this with the political idea "No Voice, Free Exit":

> "If gov-corp doesn’t deliver acceptable value for its taxes (sovereign rent), they can notify its customer service function, and if necessary take their custom elsewhere. Gov-corp would concentrate upon running an efficient, attractive, vital, clean, and secure country, of a kind that is able to draw customers."[17]

Ana Teixeira Pinto describes the political ideology of the gov-corp model as a form of classical libertarianism: "they do not want to limit the power of the state, they want to privatise it."[22]

According to criminal justice professor George Michael, neoreaction seeks to save its ideal of Western civilization through adoption of a monarchical, or CEO model of government to replace democracy. It also embraces "accelerationism", by which the creation and promotion of societal crises is to hasten the adoption of the neoreactive state.[23]

## Relation to the alt-right

Some consider the Dark Enlightenment part of the alt-right, representing its theoretical branch.[3][24] The Dark Enlightenment has been labelled by some as neo-fascist,[3] and by University of Chichester professor Benjamin Noys[3] as "an acceleration of capitalism to a fascist point". Nick Land disputes the similarity between his ideas and fascism, claiming that "Fascism is a mass anti-capitalist movement,"[3] whereas he prefers that "[capitalist] corporate power should become the organizing force in society."[3]

Journalist and pundit James Kirchick states that "although neo-reactionary thinkers disdain the masses and claim to despise populism and people more generally, what ties them to the rest of the alt-right is their unapologetically racist element, their shared misanthropy and their resentment of mismanagement by the ruling elites."[25]

Scholar Andrew Jones, in a 2019 article, postulated that the Dark Enlightenment (i.e. the NeoReactionary Movement) is "key to understanding the Alt-Right" political ideology.[26] "The use of affect theory, postmodern critiques of modernity, and a fixation on critiquing regimes of truth", Jones remarks, "are fundamental to NeoReaction (NRx) and what separates it from other Far-Right theory".[26] Moreover, Jones argues that Dark Enlightenment's fixation on aesthetics, history, and philosophy, as opposed to the traditional empirical approach, distinguishes it from related far-right ideologies.

Historian Joe Mulhall, writing for *The Guardian*, described Nick Land as "propagating very far-right ideas."[27] Despite neoreaction's limited online audience, Mulhall considers the ideology to have "acted as both a tributary into the alt-right and as a key constituent part [of the alt-right]."[27]

Historians Angela Dimitrakaki and Harry Weeks tie Dark Enlightenment to neofascism via Nick Land's "capitalist eschatology" which they describe as supported by the supremacist theories of fascism. Dimitrakaki and Weeks say of Land that his book *Dark Enlightenment* was "infusing theoretical jargon into Yarvin/Moldbug's blog "Unqualified Reservations". [28]

Describing the impact of Dark Enlightenment theories upon the contemporary art world, art historian Sven Lütticken says that the popularity of Nick Land's concepts have made certain art centers in New York and London hospitable to trendy fascism. [29]

## Critiques

Journalist Andrew Sullivan argues that neoreaction's pessimistic appraisal of democracy dismisses many advances that have been made and that global manufacturing patterns also limit the economic independence that sovereign states can have from one another.[30]

In an article for *The Sociological Review*, after an examination of neoreaction's core tenets, Roger Burrows deplores the ideology as "hyper-neoliberal, technologically deterministic, anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian, pro-eugenicist, racist and, likely, fascist", and ridicules the entire accelerationist framework as a faulty attempt at "mainstreaming... misogynist, racist and fascist discourses."[31] He criticizes neoreaction's racial principles and their brazen "disavowal of any discourses" advocating for socio-economic equality and, accordingly, considers it a "eugenic philosophy" in favor of what Nick Land deems "hyper-racism".[31]

## See also

- Authoritarian capitalism – Economic system in which a market economy exists alongside an authoritarian government
- *Democracy: The God That Failed* – 2001 book by Hans-Hermann Hoppe
- Intellectual dark web – Commentators opposed to identity politics and political correctness
- Reactionary modernism – Political ideology characterized by embrace of technology and anti-Enlightenment thought
- Social Darwinism – Group of pseudoscientific theories and societal practices
- *The Fourth Political Theory* – 2009 book by Aleksandr Dugin

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